

世界经典文学作品赏析(英汉对照)

Victor Hugo's
LES MISERABLES

Lawrence Klibbe

维克多·雨果的

悲惨世界



外语教学与研究出版社



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INTRODUCTION

LIFE AND WORKS OF VICTOR HUGO

VICTOR HUGO: Victor Hugo was born in Besançon on February 26, 1802, and died in Paris on May 22, 1885. Thus he dominates French literature during the entire nineteenth century, and the period has been called "The Century of Victor Hugo." The varied and controversial literary and political movements of the age are reflected in his works, and he forcefully represents the prevailing beliefs in science, democracy, and liberty. Hugo overshadows his contemporaries by the vast output of his pen, and the authoritative edition of his writings comprises forty-five volumes.

YOUTH: The early years of Victor Hugo coincided with the "Age of Napoleon," and the future writer's father was an officer and later a general in the French Army. His early childhood was spent in Paris and abroad. Sojourns with his father took place in Corsica (1803), Naples (1808), and Spain (1811). However, his formal education took place in the French capital, and he attended excellent schools, such as the famous *lycée* Louis-le-Grand (1816-1818), which is an approximate equivalent of an American high school and junior college. The domestic situation between his parents was very stormy, and in 1818 a legal separation occurred. In 1817 he won an "Honorable Mention" award for poetry from the French Academy, and this surprising literary triumph at the age of fifteen determined him on a writing career. In his notebook, he wrote: "I will be Chateaubriand or nothing." Chateaubriand was the leading French writer during the early nineteenth century.

EARLY SUCCESS: In 1819 Hugo definitely made his choice in favor of literature: he secured prizes from the Academy of Toulouse and again from the French Academy; and he founded, with his two brothers, a magazine called *Le Conservateur littéraire* (1819-1821). But the death of his mother in 1821 and the unsympathetic reaction to his requests for money from General Hugo to support a writing career caused the end of the review. Nevertheless, Hugo published *Odes* in 1822, and the poems received wide acclaim from government and literary circles. Chateaubriand praised the young man who aspired to his laurels, and the king, Louis XVIII, granted a pension to Hugo. That same year, he married a childhood sweetheart, Adele Foucher, and literally started on the path of his affectionate title, "Papa Hugo," as four children were soon born, in 1824, 1826, 1828, and 1830.

LEADERSHIP OF THE ROMANTIC SCHOOL: At this time, Europe was caught in the onrushing tides of Romanticism, that literary and political reaction against Classicism, which urged freedom and liberty as the principles of art and life. Hugo wrote in 1823 a "Gothic" or "Terror" novel, *Han d'Islande*, which emphasized the grotesque and frightful as a reaction to the well-ordered world of the Classicists. Thus, Hans, the horrible monster, slays his enemies with a stone ax and drinks the blood from a human skull.

However, Hugo also composed poetry with more tranquil themes of the Romantic Movement. This poetry achieved increasing popularity with the public and with the young Romantics. Books such as *Nouvelles Odes* (1824), *Odes et Ballades* (1826), and *Les Orientales* (1829) secured his leadership of the struggling poets of Romanticism. As a critic, he won fame with another magazine, *Muse française*, which only lasted about one year (1823-1824),

but gathered about Hugo many of the able young writers. By 1827, Hugo was considered the acknowledged chieftain of the embattled Romantics through two efforts: the formation of the Romantic *Cénacle* or literary circle at Hugo's home, and the publication of the *Préface de Cromwell*. The *Cénacle* brought Hugo into contact with Sainte-Beuve, perhaps the most formidable literary critic of nineteenth-century France, and with all the ideas and exponents of Romantic doctrine. The preface to the play *Cromwell* is far more important than the drama: Hugo urged the Romantics to accept Shakespeare as their model; and he advocated freedom from the three unities of time, place, and action. He also upheld the mingling in the same work of the tragic and the comic, the grotesque and the sublime. The preface resulted in an uproar, and the Romantic battle was joined in the area of the theater.

ROMANTIC TRIUMPH: Hugo now had to defend his theories in practical form: he had to write a play which would follow the rules of the *Préface de Cromwell*. In 1830, the famous "Battle of *Hernani*" occurred. Hugo wrote this play, *Hernani*, utilizing Spain as the background which fitted the doctrine of the exotic, mysterious, and medieval as proper "Romantic" subjects. *Hernani* violated almost every possible classical rule; for example, Hugo shifted the stress of the lines from the rigid formulae of Corneille and Racine, the seventeenth-century French dramatists, to a variety of emphatic measures. In fact, this last innovation started the "battle" between the two sides. The classicists hooted and howled at the very first line of the play which showed this change. Théophile Gautier, a famous writer and witness of the event, wrote: "Two systems, two parties, two armies, it is not too much to say two civilizations confronted each other, hating each other cordially, as one hates in literary quarrels, and ready to swoop down on each other." The play lasted

forty-five performances, a very respectable figure at that time, and the classicists finally yielded, accepting the drama. Hugo was unanimously hailed as the slayer of the classical dragon. Romanticism triumphed now in all genres.

MORE ROMANTIC VICTORIES: Victorious in the area of Romantic poetry and now in the Romantic theater, Hugo devoted his time to continuing his fame in these genres. His poetry added to his already well-established name, and he wrote five more Romantic dramas between 1831 and 1835. The height of his victory in the drama came in 1838 with *Ruy Blas*, another play set in Spain. Only the novel had been neglected seriously by him, although he had written *Han d'Islande* in 1823. His energies were now channeled again to this genre; for one thing, he had signed a contract in 1828 to write a historical novel, and the manuscript was due within five months of the signing. As a result of the editor's howls of complaint, Hugo at last started to write the book in late 1830, and the novel was published as *Notre-Dame de Paris* in 1831. Translated into English as *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, this novel has won Hugo more popularity perhaps than *Les Misérables* because of the several motion-picture versions, the melodramatic story of Quasimodo, the monstrous bellringer of the cathedral, and the picturesque setting of Notre Dame and medieval Paris. Hugo himself defined the work as a "work of imagination, caprice, and fantasy." Unopposed as leader of the Romantic school, Hugo now stormed the bastions of the French Academy. Repulsed in 1836 twice in his bid for membership, and again during 1839-1840, he finally secured a place in 1841 by the narrow vote of 17 to 15.

POLITICAL COMMITMENT: The ten years from 1841 through 1851 marked the political education and commitment of Victor

Hugo. Although Romanticism by its advocacy of liberty and freedom in literature was also linked closely to the winning of these ideals in the political arena, Hugo had veered dangerously close to the conservative and monarchical viewpoints during previous years. For example, he showed himself attracted to the cult of Napoleon Bonaparte around 1831, to liberalism between 1832 and 1835, and to the July Monarchy of Louis-Philippe (1830-1848) which had the support of the *bourgeoisie*, or middle class. In fact, the Duke of Orléans had supported his bid to the French Academy; and in 1845 Victor Hugo was named a Peer of France. During the Second Republic (1848-1851), Hugo committed himself completely to the democratic and liberal ideals which he followed the rest of his life. In 1848 he was elected to the National Assembly and at first tried to steer a moderate course between the urgent demands of the suffering proletariat and the *bourgeoisie*. For this reason, he spoke and wrote for the candidacy of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, nephew of Napoleon I, as president of the French Republic. His doubts about the former's imperialistic ambitions were subdued by a tendency to compromise until 1851. Then Hugo saw the results of his early folly in following a dictator bent upon total power; Louis Napoleon wanted to destroy the Republic and become the emperor of France as Napoleon III. In the three years of compromise and silence, Hugo saw that France was now willing to follow Louis Napoleon. By the time Hugo was determined to denounce the dictator, all popular support was lacking.

EXILE: Nevertheless, on July 17, 1851, Victor Hugo delivered a bitter attack in the National Assembly against Louis Napoleon. He angrily said that "because we had had Napoleon the Great, must we have Napoleon the Little?" This famous phrase, *Napoléon le Petit*, became the rallying cry of Victor Hugo against Napoleon III for

nineteen years. Orders for his arrest were signed on Dec. 3, 1851, after Napoleon III had crushed all resistance to his coming conversion of France into an empire. Hugo fled first to Belgium, where his continuing political activity forced that government to urge his departure. After a few days in London, he settled definitively on the Island of Jersey in the English Channel—within sight of the French coast. He composed a book of satirical poetry, *Les Châtiments*, in 1853 against the French Emperor in which he predicted very accurately that Napoleon III would lead France down the road to defeat. Hugo depicted Napoleon III as a thief, a tyrant, and a coward. However, the tides of political fortunes were flowing in favor of his enemy: England and France had become allies against Russia in the Crimean War, and Hugo's attacks were embarrassing to the British government. In 1855, he was compelled to move to the island of Guernsey near Jersey where he was likewise ordered to stay out of the foreign affairs of England.

RETURN TO LITERARY ACHIEVEMENTS: While this latest blow stifled his political activity, at least openly, the years at Guernsey were a period of intense literary achievement. Hugo had observed and learned much about human nature, men in power, and the political struggle of the nineteenth century. By the terms of his new exile on Guernsey, he decided to express in literature the profound truths he had acquired at great cost. The poems in *Les Contemplations* (1856), are completely divorced from politics; the lyrical and philosophical aspects predominate in the themes of nature, love, and death. In *La Légende des siècles* (1859), Hugo endeavors to write a historical and philosophical poem about the progress of mankind through the centuries. By refusing to go along with the dictatorial plans of Napoleon III, Hugo had sacrificed a large income of about 60,000 francs a year and had been required to live rather frugally.

Thus for Hugo the reduced income from his writings was a necessary substitute for his political idealism, which had caused him financial losses. However, he could have returned to France because Napoleon III announced a general amnesty for all his foes in exile. But Hugo stubbornly proclaimed that either Napoleon III or he would have to live in exile—and since the former seemed securely in power in Paris, Hugo would remain abroad. Hugo wrote: “True to the engagement I have made with my own conscience, I shall share to the end the exile of Liberty. When Liberty returns, I shall return.”

LES MISÉRABLES: This courageous stand allowed him time to compose his acknowledged masterpiece, *Les Misérables*, published in 1862. He had been working on the manuscript, *Les Misères*, prior to 1848 when he actively entered politics. Now, in exile in 1860, he had taken up the project in great earnest. He wrote that “Dante created a hell out of poetry; I have tried to create one out of reality.” This book of more than twelve hundred pages was almost immediately recognized as *the* novel of the nineteenth century; both critical and popular acclaim came to Hugo at the age of sixty when he had seemed to be on the sidelines of the new literary movement of Realism. Perhaps the brief preface to the book is the best initial clue to his aims and beliefs: “So long as there shall exist, by reason of law and custom, a social condemnation, which, in the face of civilization, artificially creates hells on earth, and complicates a destiny that is divine, with human fatality; so long as the three problems of the age—the degradation of man by poverty, the ruin of woman by starvation, and the dwarfing of childhood by physical and spiritual night—are not solved; so long as, in certain regions, social asphyxia shall be possible; in other words, and from a yet more extended point of view, so long as ignorance and misery remain on

earth, books like this cannot be useless."

RETURN TO FRANCE: After nineteen years, Hugo's warnings about the disasters which would occur because of the dictatorship of Napoleon III proved accurate. In 1870, France was quickly and completely defeated in the war with Prussia, and Napoleon III surrendered the cream of the French army at Sedan. It was now the turn of "Napoléon le Petit" to go into exile. Although Hugo returned in triumph to France as the prophet vindicated, he could not enjoy his trip back. He saw the nation in defeat and hastened to Paris where he pleaded uselessly with the Prussians to make peace with the new French Republic since the Second Empire had collapsed. He then exhorted the French to continue the fight, was elected again to the National Assembly, and strove for a just peace between France and Germany. He wrote: "No more frontiers! The Rhine for all! Let us be the same Republic, the United States of Europe. . . . Let there be universal peace! And now let us shake hands, for we have rendered service to each other; you have delivered us from our emperor, and we deliver you from yours." When Germany demanded acceptance of a harsh peace treaty and France immediately began to plan revenge, Hugo wrote prophetically of the future of Europe: "There will be henceforth in Europe two nations to be feared: one because it will be victorious, the other because it will be vanquished." The increasing bitterness between Frenchmen on the Left and on the Right further disillusioned Hugo, and he strove to achieve a stable government. At last, he ironically left France again, this time of his own accord, and went back in 1872 to Guernsey where he had spent so many years gazing at his native land in the distance.

LAST YEARS: In 1873, Hugo came back once more to Paris and

was elected to the Senate in 1876. Still the old warhorse of politics, he fought any possible signs of a new dictatorship. For example, he helped to block the growing ambitions for more power of Marshal MacMahon who had been chosen president. After 1878, he continued to publish, but the works had been written at earlier dates. It is of course impossible to list even all the major works of Victor Hugo, but one must bear in mind that he had produced important literary efforts in the midst of intense political action. For example, he wrote two symbolic novels, *Les travailleurs de la mer* (1866) and *L'homme qui rit* (1869) during the years of exile as well as *William Shakespeare* (1864), a critical essay which revealed more of Hugo's thought than that of the English dramatist. In 1874, Hugo published a historical novel about the French Revolution, *Quatre-vingt-Treize*; and in 1877 appeared a continuation of *La légende des siècles*. On the occasion of his eightieth birthday, Hugo was eulogized by his countrymen as a national hero. However, his health was gradually failing, and his role in literary and political activities was clearly at an end. In the summer of 1883, he left the following indications as a form of last testament:

I give 50,000 francs to the poor.

I wish to be carried to the cemetery in their hearse.

I refuse the prayers of all churches.

I believe in God.

However, his death occasioned a period of national mourning, and the funeral ceremonies were marked by unparalleled pomp and circumstance. Maurice Barrès, the French novelist, wrote that: "The scene had to be seen to be believed. . . . A mass of people eddied and flowed from as far away as the Place de la Concorde, pressing forward against the barrier of terrified horses to within two hundred yards of the catafalque. There was, in them, a wild wonder at the knowledge that they had made a god. . . ."

CONTINUING FAME AND CRITICAL REPUTATION: Although critical reaction after his death in 1885 has not always been kind to Victor Hugo, his importance has been certainly recognized by his fellow poets. André Maurois, biographer of Hugo among others, states that "other poets, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Valéry, have been thought to attain to a greater perfection, and indeed, because of the strict and novel standards which they set themselves, have frequently done so. But without Hugo they would never have existed at all, as they themselves have admitted." One of these poets, Paul Valéry, a major poetic influence in the twentieth century, confirms this statement: "He was the very embodiment of power. . . . To get a clear view of his stature, one has to realize what the poets born within the climate of his influence had had to invent in order to be able to compete with him at all."

On June 10, 1952, the 150th anniversary of his birth was celebrated in Paris, and France paid devoted tribute to the memory of Victor Hugo. "Never," writes again André Maurois, "has a nation been so closely knit with one single body of writing." While Hugo may not be deemed a dominant influence on the writers and in the literature of contemporary France, he is genuinely regarded with respect as the man who most nobly represents the French spirit of the nineteenth century. He also epitomizes in *Les Misérables* all the political, social, and literary problems and ideals of that era. Foreign impressions of this situation obviously have been formed by the novel, as can be seen in the many translations in all countries since 1862.

For American readers, Victor Hugo is probably known very little as a poet and dramatist, if one excludes academic circles and students of French literature. As a novelist, he is certainly familiar to Ameri-

can audiences through two works, *Notre-Dame de Paris* and *Les Misérables*. The first novel, with its thrilling, melodramatic action and exotic, romantic descriptions, has a basic appeal in plot and setting. However, there can be little doubt that the second novel is superior in terms of characters, ideas, and philosophies. *Les Misérables* still contains valid and useful ideals of goodness and humanitarianism for the quest of man toward progress and enlightenment.

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY BACKGROUND

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION: On July 14, 1789, celebrated by the French as their national holiday, the people of Paris stormed and captured the fortress of the Bastille. The Bastille was the symbol of tyranny and of royal authority, so that this event represents the end of an era, the *Ancien Régime*. This feudal and hierarchical society disappeared, and France led the way for the rest of Europe into the Modern Age. King Louis XVI and his queen, Marie Antoinette, were guillotined in 1793. This execution of the sovereigns of France shook Europe to its roots, and the other monarchies of the continent began to mobilize for the overthrow of the revolutionary forces. Within France, the nation was bitterly divided between those who favored the *Ancien Régime* and those who wished to promulgate the ideals of the French Revolution.

POLITICAL CHAOS, 1789-1799: Despite the enthusiasm of the men of the French Revolution, they were unable to establish a stable and strong government. The *Constituent Assembly* (1789-1792) abolished the privileges of the *Ancien Régime* and promulgated the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*. Part of this extraordinary document reads as follows: "Men are born and live free and equal. . . . The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural

and indefensible rights of man; these rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression. . . . The law is the expression of the general will. . . . It must be the same for all, in protection and in punishment. . . . No one should be molested for his opinions, including religious ones. . . . Every citizen can therefore speak, write, publish freely, except for abuse of this liberty in situations determined by law." Of course, there were cruelties during this decade, and Charles Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities* depicts the guillotining of nobles and also of innocent victims. However, the stirring ideals inspired French soldiers to repel the foreign invaders at Valmy in 1792. Perhaps the French national anthem, the "Marseillaise," composed on the occasion of this victory, exemplifies the enthusiasm of the citizen soldiers to defend their new liberties.

The Convention (1793-1795), formed as a result of the proclamation of the French Republic in 1792, was split into the rival camps of Danton, Robespierre, and other leaders. The gospel of *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity) was accepted as a doctrine for internal improvement and also for foreign consumption. In short, France wanted to export her revolutionary theories throughout Europe. As the Reign of Terror caused a reaction on the part of more moderate groups, the Convention yielded power to the Directory which survived until 1799. The war against England and Austria had brought success, particularly in Italy, under the leadership of a young and brilliant general from the island of Corsica, Napoleon Bonaparte.

NAPOLEON I, 1800-1815: The victorious General Bonaparte overthrew the Directory at the end of 1799, and in 1800 he was named First Consul. In 1802 a plebiscite confirmed him Consul for life, but this increasing power did not satisfy the energetic and am-

bitious Napoleon. At last, he eliminated the Consulate in 1804 by establishing the First Empire with himself as the emperor, Napoleon I. France accepted these changes and the ambitions of the "Little Corporal" because of the many military victories which Napoleon won and the domestic reforms he inaugurated. French culture and the lofty ideals of the French Revolution were spread throughout Europe, and the nation became the dominant power on the continent. Under the First Empire, more prestige accrued to Napoleon and France with the conquest of almost all Europe so that by 1810, the height of the First Empire, almost 100,000,000 people were under French control. In 1812 occurred the disastrous expedition against Russia and a series of defeats on the battlefield which compelled his abdication in 1814 and retreat to the island of Elba in the Mediterranean Sea. Napoleon returned in 1815 for "The Hundred Days," which ended in June with the defeat at Waterloo. This time he was exiled to the more distant island of St. Helena in the Atlantic Ocean, where he died in 1821. In 1840 his ashes were solemnly returned to Paris under the dome of Les Invalides. By this time, the misfortunes and disasters of France were forgotten, and the cult of Napoleon started in earnest. The unhappy political situation after 1815 also aided the partisans of the "Napoleon Legend" in their efforts to restore the glories of France.

THE RESTORATION, 1815-1830: France, exhausted by the continuous wars of the First Empire from 1804 to 1815 in which 1,700,000 men had been lost on the battlefields, accepted the restoration of the royal house of the Bourbons in the person of Louis XVIII. He was a moderate who gave some rights to the people, such as a constitution and a parliamentary regime, but who generally favored the attempt to restore all the privileges and characteristics of the *Ancien Régime*. While his reign from 1815 until 1824 was